



Central States Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Coming Back Together: Developing a Plan Central States Synod, ELCA

There are no hard and fast dates that we can give you by which you can safely re-open. **It will not happen all at once, but in phases.** It is vital that you stay tuned in to your local/regional conditions. If you have local ministerium, you may want to coordinate decisions and message with them, where possible. As always, it is our love of neighbor that guides us. If you have significant reservations as you look at specific dates, it might be a sign that it is too early. Err on the side of caution. As you proceed with developing a plan, below is what the different phases might look like as well as specific ideas regarding worship and other aspects of your congregational plan.

Phase 1 - Once your region has had 14 days of declining cases you may consider resuming certain activities while practicing **strict social distancing** such as:

- Small group gatherings such Bible studies, council and committee meetings
- Worship, weddings, funerals (six feet apart, no passing of the peace, no passing the offering plate, etc)
- No fellowship activities or shared food activities
- No education or youth activities
- Vulnerable adults discouraged from attending

(During Phase 1, congregations should consider using the Service of the Word. Practicing strict social distancing will be very challenging in the distribution of communion. During Phase 1 worship services may be **smaller & shorter** which may help people get used to gathering again in person. This may involve offering more worship times.)

Phase 2 – Once your region has had 28 days of declining cases without resurgence what activities can you resume while practicing **moderate social distancing?**

Phase 3 – Once your region has had 42 days of declining cases without resurgence what activities can you resume while practicing **limited social distancing?**

Basic Considerations

- Are you going to encourage people to wear masks? If so, will you be able to provide masks for those who do not have them?
- Request that people not shake hands.
- Have doors propped open (including stalls on bathroom) so no one needs to open doors.
- Wipe down pews, bathrooms & other surfaces between services.
- If you do not use disposable cups, is there a way to make sure cups are sanitized? Consider using disposable cups for a period.
- Store bought, sealed food is better than homemade.
- How will you encourage social distancing in the building? Will there be signs to remind people?
- How will you determine how many people can gather at one time? Will you have door monitors?
- How will you train leaders to follow the guidelines set up?
- Will you have hand sanitizer at the entrances or readily available?

Worship Considerations:

- Vulnerable adults will be discouraged from attending gatherings. How will you continue to provide worship experiences for those who are not able to attend or are not comfortable attending? Will you continue to provide on-line worship opportunities?
- Train ushers to **not** shake hands or pass out bulletins. If bulletins are used, place them on the pews prior to the service, six feet apart, to encourage social distancing.
- During the welcome, thank people for coming and politely remind them not to shake hands or hug.
- Rather than passing an offering plate, place the plate in the back of the church for people to drop their offering in as they enter or leave the church. **Continue to encourage on-line giving.**
- Use the offering time to talk about the church's ongoing ministries emphasizing the difference these financial gifts are making.
- Pass the peace with a simple bow to those on your right or left or as a communal sharing between the pastor and worshippers spoken in words.
- Greeters can stand at the doors as people leave, thanking them for coming and answering questions.
- How will you communicate the changes in the worship service so that people know what to expect when they come to worship?

Preparing for Communion - Until we are in at least phase 2, preferably phase 3, congregations should consider using the Service of the Word.

- Communion preparers wash their hand thoroughly prior to preparing communion. Washing is twice as effective as hand sanitizer. Communion assistants should also wash hands just prior to serving communion.
- The common cup is usually the most sanitary means of communion since most germs are on the hands. But because the coronavirus is passed by airborne droplets, consideration should be given to using individual cups.
- Wafers are safer as bread requires more handling than wafers.
- The pastor should consecrate the elements without touching them.
- Those distributing wafers should try to avoid touching the communicant's hands. Those distributing wine only touch the trays, not the individual cups.
- Communion in one kind is acceptable and appropriate if congregations are more comfortable during a period just offering wafers.

Communication

- Develop a clear plan with guidelines that people can understand, including the "why."
- Use multiple avenues to get the word out, including signs or posters once in the building as reminders.
- Be consistent but gentle with reminders – this is a new way of being and it is not easy to change habits.
- Allow space for questions, concerns, laments, and even push back recognizing that this is a change for people and there has already been so much change in people's lives

This document is designed to give congregations suggestions and ideas that they can adapt to their individual contexts and practices so that people can gather with confidence that safety precautions have been taken into consideration. It is important to clearly communicate the plan for worship along with adaptations that evolve as the situation changes. **The plan will need to change as circumstances warrant.** Please reach out to synod staff with questions or assistance.